DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 318 925 CG 022 469

AUTHOR Anderson, Karen M.
TITLE Does Academic Performance Feedback Affect Children's Self-Esteem?
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Age Differences; Child Development; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Feedback; *Grade 3; *Grade 6; *Report Cards; *Self Esteem

ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether academic achievement (as reflected on report cards) would have an effect upon children's self-esteem. Subjects were 46 third- and 40 sixth-grade students. Thirty of the third-graders and 28 of the sixth-graders completed Harter's Self-Perception Profile 2 weeks before report cards were distributed and again the week after report cards had been received. At the second session, students also answered four follow-up questions regarding their reactions to their report cards. A control group of 15 third- and 12 sixth-graders were seen the week after report cards were received and again 2 weeks later, completing the self-esteem profile at both sessions. The findings revealed that self-esteem scores across time were significantly less stable for the third-graders than for the sixth-graders. In general this instability did not appear directly related to report cards. Third-graders had higher responses to three of four follow-up questions regarding reactions to the report cards, suggesting developmental differences in terms of how children react to this form of academic feedback information. A lack of differences in Scholastic Competence change scores between target and control groups suggests that any changes in self-esteem that occurred among target third-graders were not necessarily caused by report cards. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED318925

Does Academic Performance Feedback Affect Children's Self-Esteem?

Karen M. Anderson

Santa Clara University

CG 022 469

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 1990.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Karen M. Anderson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Does Academic Performance Feedback Affect Children's Self-Esteem?

Introduction

Most "grown-ups," including both parents and teachers, typically assume that children perceive the academic feedback information they receive to be extremely important. This assumption is particularly true with regards to the famed "report card day." Additionally, we adults assume that this type of feedback has a wide range of important consequences for children, particularly elementary school-aged children.

One possible consequence of receiving the report card is that this particular type of feedback will have an impact upon a child's self-esteem. Because academic performance is highly valued in our society, and because those adults who play important roles in children's lives tend to value academic achievement, we might predict that the receipt of the report card is an event that clearly could have an impact on children's self-esteem.

In fact, a few studies have demonstrated a relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. Early studies, which were primarily correlational in nature, showed moderate but positive correlations between self-esteem and achievement test scores. Because of the correlational nature of these studies, however, little can be said about the cause-effect relationship between these two variables. In other words, does higher self-esteem lead to higher achievement scores, or does achievement lead to higher self-esteem?

Later studies examining the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement have demonstrated that academic

achievement does appear to predict self-esteem, rather than vice-versa. This seems to be particularly true when self-esteem is measured more specifically (in other words, when academic self-esteem is measured.) However, these studies have not investigated the effects of academic achievement as measured by the report card. This would seem to be a much more ecologically valid measure of academic achievement than other commonly used measures, such as teacher ratings of academic ability (e.g. Harter & Connell, 1982) or observed task orientation (e.g., Shiffler, Lynch-Sauer, & Nadelman, 1977).

The present study, then, investigated the question of whether academic achievement (in this case, the report card) would have an effect upon children's self-esteem. An additional question of interest in the present study involved the question of whether there are developmental differences in the relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem. A final issue of concern involves the question of whether there might be other variables that mediate the relationship between academic feedback and self-esteem.

Method

The instrument used to measure self-esteem in the present study was Harter's Self-Perception Profile (1985), a self-report questionnaire that contains 36 questions. The Self-Perception Profile is designed to measure six separate components or types of self-esteem (Global Self-Worth; Social Acceptance; Athletic Competence; Behavioral Conduct; Physical Appearance; and Scholastic Competence), and each question is answered according to a four-point scale. For the purposes of the present talk, only changes in

Scholastic Competence, or academic self-esteem, will be discussed.

Academic achievement or feedback was measured from the grades on each child's actual report card. These data were converted to numerical form for data analysis purposes.

Subjects in the present study were 40 children in the sixth grade and 46 children in the third grade, all attending public schools. These children were divided into two groups. The Target group consisted of 58 subjects (28 sixth graders and 30 third graders). This group was seen at Session 1, approximately two weeks before the report card date, and again at Session 2, during the week directly following the receipt of the report card. At Session 1, both self-esteem and self-complexity (a possible mediating variable) were assessed. At Session 2, self-esteem was again measured, and children also answered four follow-up questions regarding their reactions to the report cards (other possible mediating variables). These questions asked the children how happy they were with their grades; how happy their parents were; how surprised they were with their grades; and how important they thought their grades were.

The second group consisted of 27 children (12 sixth and 15 third graders) who were seen at Session 2, and again at Session 3 (approximately two weeks later). Because there was no intervening event (such as the report card) between Sessions 2 and 3, this Control group was designed to serve as a comparison group to the Target subjects. This group completed only the self-esteem instrument at Sessions 2 and 3.

Results

Unless otherwise noted, all data analyses to be described

concern the Target children. Additionally, results regarding age differences will be presented where relevant.

The results indicated that the self-esteem scores of the younger subjects were significantly less stable than those of the sixth graders. Among the third graders, three of the six self-esteem subscale scores (Athletic Competence, Behavioral Conduct, and Scholastic Competence) changed significantly from Session 1 to Session 2. In contrast, the sixth graders' scores were much more stable.

One might expect that these changes in self-esteem, particularly changes in Scholastic Competence, to be related to the receipt of the report card. Thus, the correlation between the actual grades the child received (a composite grade score) and the Scholastic Competence difference score (Session 2 - Session 1) was computed. This correlation, although positive, was not significant. In other words, the child's grades were not significantly related to changes in Scholastic self-esteem.

A second analysis involved comparing the Scholastic Competence difference scores for the Target and Control groups. It was predicted that because there was no intervening event for the Control subjects, their scores should be significantly lower than scores for the Target group. A paired t-test comparing means for the Target and Control groups, however, showed no significant difference. This indicates that there was not significantly greater changes in self-esteem for the Target children, due to the report card. It may be that the Control children, because they were also seen during the week directly following the receipt of the report card, were affected by the report card as well.

However, this explanation is speculative.

Thus, although there were changes in Scholastic self-esteem for the Target group third graders, these changes did not appear to be related to report card grades.

A second set of analyses addressed the question of whether there might be other variables mediating the relationship between academic feedback and self-esteem. In the present study, two sets of mediating variables were considered: Self-complexity, or the complexity of the child's organization of self-relevant information, and the children's responses to the four follow-up questions regarding their reactions to their report cards.

Self-complexity, for purposes of the present study, was conceptualized in terms of two different variables: Differentiation, or the number of different aspects of the self that the child mentioned, and Scholastic Centrality, or the degree to which these different aspects of the self were organized around the Academic self. These two self-complexity variables were hypothesized to be potential mediating variables. However, the correlation between Differentiation scores and the Scholastic Competence difference scores was not significant, nor was the correlation between Scholastic Centrality and the difference score. Thus, in the present study, it must be concluded that self-complexity variables did not mediate the relationship between academic feedback and the stability of self-esteem.

The final set of analyses to be discussed involve the children's responses to the four follow-up questions. Interestingly, the third graders had significantly higher responses on three of the four follow-up questions than the sixth graders.

This implies that in general, the younger children had more positive feelings about their report cards. This may reflect the general tendency of younger children to overrate their own abilities (e.g. Harter, 1982). It is also possible that the sixth graders, because of their greater amounts of experience with report cards, were simply being more realistic.

Correlations between responses to the follow-up questions and the Scholastic Competence difference scores were also computed, in order to investigate whether children's feelings about their report cards might have mediated changes in self-esteem. The correlation between the Scholastic Competence difference score and students' feelings of happiness with their report cards was not significant. Nor was the correlation with the importance question significant. However, the correlation with parent's happiness varied considerably for the two age groups. The correlation for the third graders was significant and positive, indicating that children's self-esteem was positively associated with parental reactions. In contrast, the correlation for the sixth graders was significant but negative, indicating that parental feelings of happiness or dissatisfaction seemed to have the opposite effect upon their children's self-esteem. Perhaps for the older children, perceptions of academic achievement begin to diverge from those of their parents. It is also possible that children who receive good grades have parents who are more demanding of their children, and thus are perceived by their children as not being happy with their grades.

The final correlation involved the question of how surprised children were with the grades they received. Again, responses to

this question were correlated with the Scholastic Competence difference scores. For the third graders, this correlation was significant and positive, indicating that changes in Scholastic self-esteem were positively related to how surprised the children were with the grades they received. The correlation for the sixth graders, however, was negative but nonsignificant.

The final analyses to be discussed involve correlations between the child's composite grade scores and the responses to the follow-up questions. In both age groups, there were strong positive correlations between the grade scores and responses to the two questions regarding both children's and parent's happiness with the report cards. This correlation was, in fact, significantly stronger for the older children. This may be because grades become increasingly important to parents as their children get older.

Correlations between the "how important" question and the grade score were not significant for either group. Finally, a strong negative correlation between the "surprised" question and grade scores was found for the sixth graders. This seems to indicate that students who received higher grades were in fact less surprised by those grades. Among the older children, then, the good students were more accurate in predicting what their grades would be than were the poor students.

Taken together, this final set of correlations clearly do indicate that children in both age groups did have strong affective reactions to their report cards. However, these reactions did not appear to lead to changes in self-esteem.

Discussion

In discussing the findings regarding the three major issues of

interest in the present study, perhaps the most interesting results were the age differences found between the third and sixth graders. Self-esteem scores were significantly less stable for the younger children. However, these changes did not appear to be directly related to the report cards received by the children. Nor did any of the hypothesized mediating variables appear to in fact mediate the relationship between report cards and self-esteem. Nevertheless, the instability of self-esteem for the younger children is an issue that deserves further study.

The third graders also had higher responses to three of the four follow-up questions regarding reactions to the report cards, indicating that there do seem to be developmental differences in terms of how children react to this form of academic feedback information. There were also differences in the patterns of correlations between the two age groups in comparing responses to the follow-up questions with changes in Scholastic self-esteem. Finally, there were differences in the correlations between the responses to the follow-up questions and the composite grade scores.

The lack of differences in Scholastic Competence change scores between the Target and Control groups implies that any changes in self-esteem that did occur for the Target group third graders were not necessarily caused by the report card. This is a surprising finding, in light of the correlations that show that children clearly did have affective reactions to their report cards.

Taken as a whole, these findings imply that perhaps children are not affected by academic performance feedback to the extent that grown-ups typically assume. It is also possible that these

effects are extremely short-lived; further research is clearly needed to address this question.

These findings also seem to indicate that there are developmental differences in terms of how children perceive the academic feedback they receive. The data regarding both the stability of self-esteem and the responses to the follow-up questions imply that children of different ages do respond differently to academic feedback, and these differences should be taken into account by educators and other adults.

Finally, I would like to suggest a number of possible directions for future research. One clear direction for future research might further investigate other potential mediators of children's reactions to academic performance feedback. For example, the kinds of attributions that children make for the grades they receive might influence self-esteem. A second issue for future research is the short-term stability of self-esteem in a general sense, and how self-esteem on a short-term basis might be related to academic performance feedback. Finally, future research should consider the mechanisms behind the age differences found in the present study.

References

Harter, S. (1982). The Perceived Competence Scale for Children. Child Development, 53, 87-97.

Harter, S. (1985). Manual for the Self-Perception Profile for Children. University of Denver.

Harter, S. & Connell, J.P. (1984). A comparison of alternative models of the relationships between academic achievement and children's perceptions of competence, control, and motivational orientation. In J. Nicholls (Ed.), The development of achievement-related cognitions and behaviors. Greenwich, CT: J.A.I. Press.

Shiffler, N., Lynch-Sauer, J., & Nadelman, L. (1977). Relationship between self-concept and classroom behavior in two informal elementary classrooms. Journal of Educational Psychology, 69, 349-359.

Karen M. Anderson
Santa Clara University

13.	☐	☐	Some kids are pretty *slow* in finishing their school work	**BUT**	Other kids can do their school work *quickly.*	☐	☐
14.	☐	☐	Some kids would like to have alot more friends	**BUT**	Other kids have as many friends as they want.	☐	☐
15.	☐	☐	Some kids think they could do well at just about any new sports activity they haven't tried before	**BUT**	Other kids are afraid they might *not* do well at sports they haven't ever tried.	☐	☐
16.	☐	☐	Some kids wish their body was *different*	**BUT**	Other kids *like* their body the way it is.	☐	☐
17.	☐	☐	Some kids usually *act* the way they know they are *supposed* to	**BUT**	Other kids often *don't* act the way they are supposed to.	☐	☐
18.	☐	☐	Some kids are *happy* with themselves as a person	**BUT**	Other kids are often *not* happy with themselves.	☐	☐

(Sample self-esteem questions)

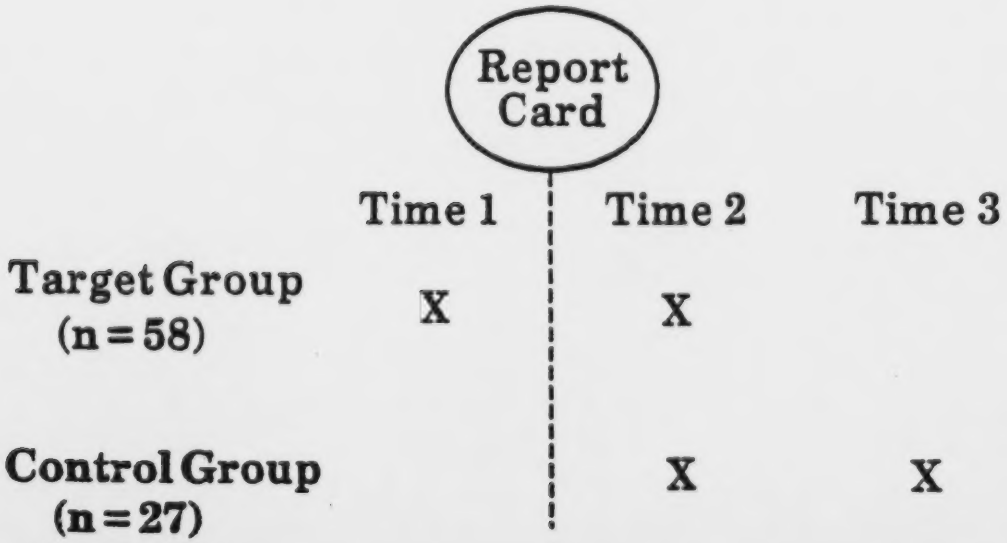

Figure 1

Table 1

Self- Esteem Scores, Session 1 vs. Session 2

Target Group, Third Grade

Self-Esteem Scales	Session 1	Session 2	t	p
Athletic Competence	17.13 (5.28)	18.18 (4.53)	-2.06	.05
Physical Appearance	18.77 (3.87)	19.10 (3.53)	-1.02	ns
Scholastic Competence	17.40 (3.43)	19.07 (3.39)	-4.30	.01
Global Self-Worth	20.00 (3.49)	19.87 (3.34)	0.31	ns
Social Acceptance	19.43 (3.15)	19.67 (2.98)	-0.49	ns
Behavioral Conduct	18.33 (3.41)	19.13 (3.30)	-1.88	.07

Note: The df for all t-tests were 29.

Table 2

Self- Esteem Scores, Session 1 vs. Session 2

Target Group, Sixth Grade

Self-Esteem Scales	Session 1	Session 2	t	p
Athletic Competence	17.64 (4.22)	18.04 (4.76)	-1.10	ns
Physical Appearance	16.50 (3.81)	17.04 (4.02)	-1.13	ns
Scholastic Competence	18.25 (3.83)	18.68 (3.31)	-1.04	ns
Global Self-Worth	20.50 (3.11)	19.89 (2.85)	0.64	ns
Social Acceptance	19.17 (3.70)	19.89 (3.28)	-1.71	ns
Behavioral Conduct	18.10 (3.88)	18.29 (3.97)	-0.46	ns

Note: The df for all t-tests were 27.

Table 3

T-Tests on Absolute Difference Subscale Scores

Target vs. Control Groups

Self-Esteem Scales	Target Group	Control Group	t	p
Athletic Competence	1.84 (1.57)	1.68 (1.34)	0.48	ns
Physical Appearance	1.67 (1.39)	1.39 (1.66)	0.82	ns
Scholastic Competence	1.93 (1.52)	2.11 (1.45)	-0.51	ns
Global Self-Worth	1.76 (1.99)	1.71 (1.74)	0.10	ns
Social Acceptance	1.98 (1.46)	1.86 (1.51)	0.37	ns
Behavioral Conduct	1.78 (1.38)	1.21 (1.07)	1.90	ns

Note: The df for all t-tests were 84.

Table 4

T-Tests by Grade on 4 Follow-Up Questions

(Target Group)

Question	Third Graders	Sixth Graders	t	p
Happy	4.60 (.56)	3.82 (1.02)	3.63	.01
Parents	4.67 (.48)	3.82 (1.19)	3.60	.01
Important	4.67 (.48)	4.57 (.74)	.58	ns
Surprised	4.27 (.94)	3.39 (1.26)	3.01	.01

Note: The df for all t-tests were 56.

Table 5

Correlations between Follow-Up Questions and Composite Grade Scores

Question	Third Graders	Sixth Graders
Happy	.45***	.69***
Parents	.32**	.78***
Important	.01	.22
Surprised	.27**	-.48***

Note: The df for all t-tests were 56.

** $p<.05$
*** $p<.01$